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ABSTRACT

This paper reports two studies that examined changes in the participants' level of moral reasoning after exposure to the Kohlberg cognitive-developmental intervention model (1975). This approach focuses on universal moral principles which are manifested in a series of developmental stages. Knowledge of these stages provides one with an outline for an intervention approach which would create experiences designed to stimulate moral reasoning. Study one involved 43 university juniors who participated in ten small group sessions. Discussions of moral dilemmas, role playing, and moral development theory comprised these sessions. Results indicated a significant increase in preference for principled levels of moral reasoning. In study two, 180 inner-city high school subjects participated in 12 to 24 similarly guided sessions. Topics included abortion, sterilization, and police relations. The format consisted of films, role playing, and discussions. Results indicated no significant changes between control and experimental groups. Findings from both groups indicate that one's level of moral reasoning may be stimulated if certain factors are present. These factors are (1) the amount of activity in the sessions; (2) the extent of teacher involvement; and (3) the amount and quality of role playing. However, if students do not initially possess sufficient cognitive capabilities, stimulation of moral reasoning will be difficult. (KC)

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The Utility of a Cognitive-Developmental Model In Stimulating Moral Reasoning

by Gary L. Sapp and Ellen Dossett

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On the basis of numerous research studies, Kohlberg (1975) has developed a theory of moral development that suggests significant implications for classroom practice. Rather than indoctrinate students to a fixed set of values, Kohlberg's approach focuses on universal moral principles abstracted from a series of longitudinal and cross-cultural research studies. These principles are manifested in a series of hierarchial, qualitatively distinct developmental stages. While the precise content of these stages may be specific to a given society, the developmental process follows a culturally universal sequence of stages. Knowledge of stage development suggests a relatively clear outline for intervention approaches. For, once the characteristic stages of moral reasoning, its progressions, and its key transition points are known, the identification of experiences that are critical to its stimulation becomes possible.

Classroom applications of the model produced significant upward change in level of moral reasoning of both elementary and secondary students. Follow-up studies indicated that the degree of change was maintained one year later (Blatt, 1973). Another study incorporated the teaching of moral dilemmas into social studies classes taught by regular classroom teachers (Kohlberg, 1975). Teachers with a minimum of training regarding application of the theory nevertheless produced increases in moral judgment of their students. These findings received further empirical support in a series of naturalistic and experimental studies that demonstrated a relationship between moral judgment and moral action

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in areas such as honesty, non-delinquency, refusal to violate the rights of others, and student activism (Kohlberg, 1975).

While other studies have investigated the effects of specific components of the model, e.g., cognitive conflict (Rybash, Sewell, Roodin, and Sullivan, 1976), role-playing (Arbuthnot, 1974), and level of moral reasoning of the E (Turiel, 1966), few naturalistic applications have been attempted. The major purpose of these studies, then, was to determine if exposure to a cognitive-developmental intervention model would produce change in levels of moral reasoning.

Study 1

Subjects:

Subjects were forty-three university juniors enrolled in an introductory Educational Psychology course. The university is located in an industrial area in the Southeast. A section taught by the senior author was selected as the experimental group and another, taught by a colleague, served as the control. Examination of pretest group means indicated no significant differences in the level of subject's moral reasoning.

Instruments:

Ss level of moral reasoning was assessed by the Defining Issues Test (Rust, et al, 1974). The test is composed of six moral dilemmas, each of which is followed by twelve related issues. The issues which are considerations for making a given moral judgment are rated on a Likert scale of importance. For this sample the DIT proved to be reasonably reliable as the test-retest correlation coefficient was r=.83.

Procedures:

The experimental group participated in ten, 30 minute, group interaction sessions over a three-month period. Treatment sessions incorporated the basic components of Kohlberg's intervention model (Kohlberg, 1975). Specifically, Ss were presented with written moral dilemmas and a series of key questions designed to produce genuine moral conflict. Discussion topics included the relative value of life vs. property, euthanasia, obedience to law, loyalty to peers, discrimination, personal conscience versus law, morality vs. legality, and sexual behavior within a contemporary society. The E functioned as a group facilitator and challenged Ss' level of reasoning. Following group discussion, Ss were placed in dyads in which they role-played the points of view of key protagonists described in the dilemmas. Midway through the study, Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental theory was presented via films and lectures.

Results:

As a result of consistency checks on the DIT and Ss' dropping the course, complete results were available on 35 Ss. The pretest and posttest means and the standard deviations are listed in Table 1.

	PRE-	POST-
Experimental	46.5 (7.8)	51.4 (6.4)
Control	46.3 (11.8)	47 (10.6)

Table 1. Pretest-Posttest means for DIT Scores

A one-way analysis of covariance was performed on the data, since posttest scores were significantly correlated with pretest scores ($r = .71$). Results indicated [illegible] when pretest scores were covaried out, the

experimental Ss scored significantly higher than the controls, $F(1,31\ df)=4.88$ $p<.05$, 1/34 df.

Discussion:

The results of Study I lend support to the findings of earlier studies (Kohlberg, 1975) which indicated that level of moral development may be effectively challenged through small group intervention techniques. Further, this study suggests that the university classroom may be an effective forum for the stimulation of moral development. The combination of an experiential and didactic approach would offer several advantages, particularly in terms of student receptiveness, motivation, and involvement. A knowledgeable classroom instructor could fulfill a vital role specified by Kohlberg's theory. For one could model the higher levels of moral reasoning, thereby exposing students to moral positions infrequently encountered in the greater society.

Study 2

Subjects:

One hundred and eighty Black students enrolled in a federally funded high school equivalency program constituted the initial sample. The subjects, 75% of whom were females, ranged in age from 17 to 21. Their tested reading competency varied from second to eighth grade levels. All subjects resided within poverty areas located in a metropolitan area in the Southeast.

Teachers:

Four classroom teachers, one Black and three White, volunteered to participate in the study. The teachers received two hours of initial

training and weekly consultation in the use of materials and group procedures developed by the investigators.

Instruments:

The Moral Advice Test (Carroll, 1974), while similar to the DIT, was used because it is more appropriate for Ss who may be poor readers. The test presents prototypic statements derived from Kohlberg's typology (Kohlberg, 1958) for the subjects' evaluation. Subject responses yield a composite rejection score that indicates degree of decline in the use of earlier modes of moral reasoning. The test author contends that this rejection score is a developmental index, analogous to that produced by Kohlberg's detailed scoring methods (Kohlberg, 1976). In this study, the DIT was found to be relatively reliable as the Spearman-Brown formula estimate of reliability was .79.

Procedure:

Prior to the beginning of the study, Ss had been assigned to twelve, approximately equal, intact groups. Groups were designated as experimental or control by one of the investigators who had no personal knowledge of the subjects. The groups received three different levels of treatment. Groups 1-4 were the controls, groups 5-8 received 1 treatment per week for a total of 12, and groups 9-12 received 2 treatments per week for a total of 24. Treatment sessions continued for a period of four months. Each participating teacher administered all levels of treatment. Discussion topics were similar to those in Study 1, although the particular interests of the subjects were considered as the study progressed. Some additional topics that provoked particular interest were abortion, compulsory sterilization, one's relation to the police,

and one's responsibility to husband/wife.

Treatment sessions were integrated into the regular curriculum and continued for the duration of a class period (40 minutes). Individual sessions followed a general format of (1) presentation of a moral dilemma by film, role-playing, or teacher verbalization, (2) discussion of relevant moral and ethical issues, (3) role-playing of characters selected from the moral dilemmas. When presenting dilemmas, teachers used materials developed by the researchers. Materials included a written description of the moral dilemma, incisive questions relevant to the dilemma, probable responses of the subjects, and the stage level represented by that response. Other information available to the teachers was the moral judgment level and the reading level of the Ss.

Results:

Since the subject attrition rate was rather high (95 of the 180 Ss completed both the pre- and post-tests), the four control groups were combined into two groups. The pretest and posttest means and the standard deviations for all groups are presented in Table 2.

	0 Dilemmas		12 Dilemmas			24 Dilemmas			
Pre	43.3 (7)	45.1 (10.8)	49.4 (4.5)	47.7 (11.4)	48.4 (8)	45.1 (6.1)	48 (9.1)	48.9 (8.4)	51.7 (8.7)	46.6 (5.7)
Post	47.1 (7.6)	48.5 (6.2)	49.1 (6.8)	47.7 (7)	47.7 (9.3)	48 (10.8)	50.2 (7)	51.6 (7)	53.7 (8.8)	47.4 (8.7)

Table 2. Pretest and Posttest Means for MAT Scores

Since posttest scores were significantly correlated with pretest scores ($r = .40$), a way one analysis of covariance using pretest scores as the covariant was performed on the data. No significant differences between the experimental and control groups were obtained.

Discussion:

The above results indicate that Ss in Study 2 evidenced little change in the rejection of lower developmental levels of moral reasoning. Prior results reported by Blatt (1973) and Kohlberg (1975) were not supported. However, the degree to which Ss necessarily reject lower level modes of reasoning as they attain higher stages in Kohlberg's typology is problematical. While the findings of Studies 1 and 2 are inconsistent, key differences between the two experimental settings make meaningful comparisons difficult. However, certain crucial factors may obtain.

One prerequisite for moral development is the achievement of a given cognitive level, as moral development tends to follow cognitive development by 4-5 years (Kohlberg, 1976). Further, diverse levels of cognitive development, a "range of reasoning" within a group (Lieberman, 1975), are more facilitative of cognitive growth than are more cognitively homogeneous groups. Examination of test results of the two groups suggested a wider range of cognitive development for Ss in Study 1, (assuming that DIT and MAT scores are comparable to Kohlberg's typology). DIT scores of these Ss ranged from level 2 to level 5. Scores of Ss in Study 2 clustered in levels 2-3 with few Ss falling in stage 4.

Since Ss in Study 1 were more advanced cognitively, stimulation of moral reasoning was a relatively easier task. Study 2 Ss apparently experienced a ceiling effect in terms of their cognitive capabilities to appreciate higher stage reasoning. If this were the case, a considerable amount of cognitive stimulation would have been necessary

before significant moral growth would have been realized.

A second factor concerns the control over administration of treatment. While efforts were made to provide for uniform application of treatment, teachers in Study 2 evidenced wide discrepancies in levels of competence in discussion, probing, challenging levels of reasoning, and conducting role-playing. The amount of activity and teacher involvement required by a program of this type is substantial, and the quality of the teacher-student interaction is crucial to its success. Since the teachers in this study were volunteers who received no remuneration, necessary control was sometimes difficult to achieve.

One final factor relevant to the outcome of both studies was the amount and quality of role-playing. Kohlberg (1976) contends that the capacity to assume the perspective of another is a singularly significant experience for the development of moral reasoning. Further, Arbuthnot (1975) indicated that stimulation of moral reasoning was realized solely through the use of role-playing techniques. Ss in Study 1 engaged in role-playing approximately 1/3 of the time spent in group interaction sessions. Whereas, analysis of teacher behavior in Study 2 indicated a tendency for them to exphasize verbal admonitions at the expense of group interaction experiences.

Conclusions:

The results of these studies are encouraging yet sobering. They indicate that one's level of moral reasoning may be stimulated if particular factors, such as range of cognitive reasoning, stimulation of dissonance, and meaningful role-playing opportunities are provided. However, if students do not initially possess sufficient cognitive capabilities, stimulation of moral reasoning may be a rather difficult task.

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